

Managing Anger

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Everyone experiences anger from time to time. It's a normal emotion. But intense or prolonged anger can jeopardize employment, relationships, education, and even freedom. Those who struggle to control their anger are increasingly finding their way to behavioral health professionals for assistance. It is precisely for this reason that SAMHSA has created resources and a new online course to help.

We see it in our schools, workplaces, families, and out in public – the person who yells, hits, or throws things – and sometimes sparked by something as small as a missed parking space. In a culture where time is short, anger can surface quickly and with intensity. And anger can erupt into physical violence. The Centers for Disease Control's 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, found that one in ten 9th to 12th graders had been physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend. SAMHSA's 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings revealed that nearly 19 percent of youth receiving mental health services have trouble controlling anger. And in 2009, the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey reported more than a half million nonfatal violent crimes took place at work. Prisons and jails are even worse, where 38-50 percent of inmates experience persistent anger and irritability. When the problem results in an arrest or other disciplinary action, there often is a referral or requirement to engage in some therapy or treatment to help manage the intense emotion and prevent additional similar experiences.

The Anger Control Plan

(excerpt taken from SAMHSA's new Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients course)

1. Take a time out (formal or informal).
2. Talk to a friend (someone you trust).
3. Use the Conflict Resolution Model to express anger.
4. Exercise (take a walk, go to the gym, etc.).
5. Attend 12-step meetings.
6. Explore primary feelings beneath the anger.

Typically, when someone gets angry, there are responses that are physiological (becoming flushed, burst of energy and arousal, etc.), cognitive (thoughts that occur in response to an event), emotional (feeling afraid, discounted, disrespected, impatient, etc.), and behavioral (sarcasm, swearing, crying, yelling, throwing, etc.). Problem anger occurs when someone experiences anger as a chronic irritability or a full-on rage – as an emotion experienced too intensely or too often. The consequences of long-term anger issues can lead to arrest, injury (self or others), adverse effects on important relationships, job loss, or treatment program ejection. Some groups have a higher risk of experiencing problems with anger, including individuals with substance use disorders, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and personality disorders.

Working with Angry Clients

"Anger management" is currently the most searched term on the SAMHSA website. This reality speaks both to the need for support around this issue and the practical benefit of SAMHSA resources like the Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients: Participant Workbook and the newly launched Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients course. The course is especially designed for anyone working with a person who struggles to control anger, but particularly substance abuse and mental health clinicians.

The Five Steps of the Conflict Resolution Model

(excerpt taken from SAMHSA's new Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients course)

1. Identify the problem that is causing the conflict.
2. Identify the feelings that are associated with the conflict.
3. Identify the impact of the problem that is causing the conflict.
4. Decide whether to resolve the conflict.
5. Work for resolution of the conflict: How would you like the problem to be resolved? Is a compromise needed?

The online course takes approximately two to three hours to complete and uses a cognitive behavioral approach to working with angry clients. It covers a range of topics including how people respond to getting angry (passively, assertively, aggressively, or passive-aggressively), how to manage anger with people with traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder, and how to assess anger and readiness for anger treatment. The course also includes a description of the cognitive behavioral therapy approach, treatment model overview, and other important information about anger management. The course is based on the Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients: A Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Manual (also available in Korean and Spanish) and the Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients: Participant Workbook (also available in Korean and Spanish).

In addition to behavioral health service providers, the course may also prove useful for human resource and other managers, school teachers and administrators, those working in the criminal justice system, or anyone experiencing anger issues. Upon completion of the course, certification is provided for continuing education credit.

Resources

- Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients: A Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Manual (also available in Korean and Spanish)
- Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients Participant Workbook (also available in Korean and Spanish)
- Anger Management for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Clients: Online Course

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